

MOBILE MENTAL WELLNESS

DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY: SOCIAL MEDIA EDITION



Each time we check our Facebook feed, post a photo to Instagram, or send out a tweet, we are chasing the feeling of being connected to others. In the meantime, these actions may be making us feel disconnected and lonely, and be contributing to the increasing rates of anxiety and depression.

Did you know?

64% of Canadians have a social media account.

2/3 of Canadians use their social media account every day.

As humans, we crave connection, seek approval and validation from others, and long for relationships. All of these things were relevant before social media and will continue to be so when social media is replaced by some other technology.

Back to Life – Back to Reality

Connection

Our well-being depends on our connections to others. We long for community, for relationships, and belonging.



Approval and Validation

We are interdependent and we seek the approval of others. It's important to find validation in the right places! Main sources include friends, family, partners, counsellors, and others in our lives that we trust and rely on.

Deep and Meaningful Relationships

We are not built for isolation. We are built for relationships. Being in long-term, healthy relationships make us feel loved, cared for, and heard. Meaningful relationships make us feel like we matter. They give our lives meaning and can foster our mental, emotional, and even physical well-being.



Does social media satisfy these needs or is there a cost to our mental wellness?

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Emerging research shows a clear, causal link between social media use (specifically passive use) and a rise in mental health issues, especially among youth and young adults. It is time to **EQUIP** ourselves with information on how social media is affecting our mental wellness and the tools that exist to alleviate some of the strain.

Exclusion. Social media makes it easy to judge personal value based on a comparison to others. We see happy families, exciting social lives, and blissful marriages, and we might ask ourselves, "How is my life stacking up?" The answer might be discouraging and based on unrealistic expectations, which can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression.

Quantifying. A shifting focus on the quantity of connections versus quality is defining loneliness. Quantifying friendships may make our connections broader, but also shallower. While loneliness can occur when one's connections are perceived to be less in quantity, it's the loss of quality of those connections that defines loneliness, which is deeply connected to depression.

Use. Social media can be a security blanket for staying connected, a means of avoiding boredom, or your only source of social interaction! Whatever your reasons for using social media, use in general is connected to depression and anxiety. Studies show that when use is limited to 10 minutes per platform per day, there is a significant decrease in anxiety and FOMO (fear of missing out).

Information Overload. The sheer volume of content that we are exposed to on a daily basis can feel overwhelming! Do we really need to know what John ate for dinner? The endless stream of mostly unimportant content distracts us from things that have real meaning and reduces the working memory and our capacity to process information.

Popularity. Social media connections (friends, likes, shares, comments, views, etc.) can be a false measurement of popularity. The "positive reinforcement" found online may not translate into real life and can trap us in a materialistic, unrealistic, ego-driven, online world.

Self-Care Tip: Try not to compare your circumstances to others. Wherever you are is ok! If you feel the need to compare, see it through your own lens. Are you in an unhappy marriage? Rather than compare it to someone else's relationship, think about one thing you can do to make your relationship happier.

Self-Care Tip: Nurture relationships that you value. When sending a DM or a tweet, follow it up with a time to meet. Feeling down and unable to initiate a meeting? That's ok! Be honest. Communicate your desire to cultivate intimacy and closeness in your relationship, and ask the other party to mutually participate.

Self-Care Tip: Be mindful of the time you spend on your phone and don't beat yourself up for it. Regulate your use by leaving it at home when socializing, avoid using it when bored by finding a new hobby, and pick times or days throughout the week when you will completely unplug.

Self-Care Tip: Be selective and filter who and what you follow, friend, or comment on. Accept that you don't have to research every thought, or engage with every piece of information you read. Determine a goal or passion and only take in the information that can move you forward.

Self-Care Tip: You are worthy. Be aware that social media can cripple your self-esteem. Try not to seek validation from others about your self-worth or put others on a pedestal. What you are seeing isn't the full reality. Just be you!

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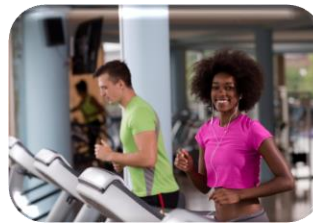
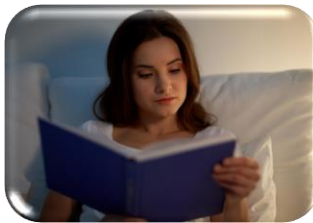
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It's All in How You Use It

Active social media use is when you actively interact with other people on social media. The majority of social media activity, however, is **passive social media use**, which is scrolling through feeds and inactively consuming content.

Would you consider yourself a communicator (active user) on social media or consumer of social media content (passive user)? How you define yourself in relation to your use can determine if social media is having a negative or positive impact on your risk of anxiety and depression. Social media isn't all bad. While passive use is related to negative outcomes, studies show that active use leads to a decrease in depressive symptoms as reported on the Patient-Reported Outcomes Measurement Information System brief depression scale. Active engagement and communication like sharing stories and opinions, and contributing to discussions, along with access to supports are beneficial to mental wellness. Social media can't be said to cause depression, but it may be a contributor. If you are unsure if social media could be influencing your mental wellness, it's always good to take a break and go back to "old fashioned" leisure activities and reconnect with your authentic self, a friend, or an old or new hobby!

Things to Do Instead of Social Media



Sources: <https://guilfordjournals.com/doi/abs/10.1521/jscp.2018.37.10.751>
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